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By **NANCY BERECKIS**  
The Birmingham Post-Herald

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Dr. Courtesy is no Miss Manners.

Her hair is a frizzy yellow afro. Her best "dress" is a mix-matched, glitter-covered clown suit. Her eyeshadow is circa 1973 baby blue.

And when she opens her mouth, instead of a hifalutin' discourse on proper etiquette, out comes a belly-laugh that would send gentle readers fleeing back to charm school.

"Ooooooh! That's good!" she squeals at a 6-year-old boy at Chalkville Elementary School. Chris Wood had just answered that the right thing to say after bumping into someone is "Excuse me."

"You know," Dr. Courtesy continues while thrusting out her hip, putting her hand behind that hair, then giving a comical wiggle, "if you're really polite, you can say, 'Pard-o-o-o-n-me.'"

The dozen children in the class begin laughing so hard, one actually stands up to double over.

Sherry Vanderver (a.k.a. Dr. Courtesy) may lack the refined elegancies of Judith Martin (a.k.a. Miss Manners), but her down-home approach to teaching politeness has won her rave reviews from both her pupils in the Jefferson County school system and their parents.

For three months, Mrs. Vanderver has traveled from one school to another trying to instill in children the importance of good manners. As Dr. Courtesy, she is the main part of the school system's "Courtesy is Contagious" campaign. The program is the brainchild of

Superintendent Herb Sang. At his last job as superintendent of the Duval County school system in Florida, he started a similar program featuring a "Mr. Courtesy." The program was so successful that when Sang came to Jefferson County he wanted to repeat it.

"One of the things that I feel is missing in our society is a lack of courtesy on the part of all of us," Sang said. "By placing emphasis on it in the schools, I can at least get children to think about being courteous."

Mrs. Vanderver, a 34-year-old mother of two who is going to college full time in the evenings to earn a teaching degree, believes in the campaign's slogan: "Courtesy is Contagious."

But she does not believe it has to be subtle.

To kick off the courtesy campaign in November, Dr. Courtesy parachuted 3,000 feet from a plane onto the field at Gardendale High School stadium.

Compared to that stunt, the one-woman show that she performs as many as 30 times a week seems tame. Compare it to normal everyday grammar school activities, however, and, as one first-grader put it, "It's wild."

Mrs. Vanderver admits she has never been shy, but she really started coming out of her shell about 10 years ago. That's when she decided to become a clown.

While teaching choir at her church, she noticed that a lot of the children could not join because (to put it bluntly) they couldn't sing. "So I was trying to think of some-

thing that everyone could do that was fun," she said. "I picked clowning."

Mrs. Vanderver checked out every book on clowns from the library and wrote Ringling Brothers for information on her new profession. She practiced with the kids, and soon they were performing for church and community groups.

She will choose a show depending on the age of the children. Or sometimes a teacher will request that she concentrate on a certain theme.

That was the case in Patricia Bailey's first-grade class at Chalkville Elementary.

Mrs. Bailey had a recurring problem with a young boy who used curse words during class.

So she called on Dr. Courtesy. "I knew immediately that what that class needed was a dose of Wrong-way Walter," Mrs. Vanderver says.

When she entered the class, they were ready for some fun. They applauded and were giggling when Dr. Courtesy bounded to the front of the class. They definitely did not seem willing to listen to a well-intentioned lecture about using proper language.

But Dr. Courtesy had no intention of being boring. She walked, talked, sat, sang and generally would not let the class lose interest in Walter, every mother's nightmare.

Walter swears. He is mean. And, to make matters worse, he squirts milk out of his nose.

But then one day, while standing outside his home on a hill, he hears an echo of the "ugly" things he is saying. Mrs. Vanderver told the engrossed class.

Walter thinks the echo is another boy saying the mean things to him, and it makes him cry. But then Walter's mother tells her son that it is only an echo.

"If you use dirty garbage words, then dirty garbage words will bounce back at you," Dr. Courtesy explained. "But if you use kind courteous words, then kind, courteous words will bounce back."

"That's my favorite program," she said as she left the class. "I think it shows children what's expected of them as adults."

As an adult, Mrs. Vanderver says she believes what is expected of her is not only to teach good manners, but to spread good will.

"I just want to spread courtesy around because then the people on the receiving end will spread it around," she said. "That's my job."

DR. COURTESY: Sherry Vanderver's alter ego teaches manners to students in Birmingham

## Clowning in the Classroom Helps Teach Kids Courtesy

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Abigail Van Buren

## Mom Keeps Kids in Line

DEAR ABBY: I would like to respond to a recent letter you received from "Down and Almost Out," whose 12- and 17-year-old children's rooms have begun to look like the local landfill. My advice may be too late for her, but it may help parents whose children are younger:

DEAR DOWN AND ALMOST OUT: Where have you been for the last 10 or 12 years? I presume you've been living in the same house as your children, right? I have a 12-year-old and a teen-ager. From the time they could understand, these were the ground rules:

1. No clothes on the floor or draped over chairs. Clothes go in the closet or a drawer. If they are soiled, they go into the hamper.

2. Wastebaskets are emptied on a regular basis (and not by me).

3. No storage of anything under the beds. Captain's beds with drawers underneath are wonderful for storage, and nothing gets dusty.

4. Absolutely, positively, no food or drink in the bedrooms. (No exceptions!) We have a kitchen for eating.

As for hairspray on the walls and ceilings, I guess you'll have to tell your children to work on better aim, or else THEY should scrub it off.

My teen-ager is neat as a pin, totally organized. My younger child is not as neat and needs more reminders, but when I see that his room is starting to get out of control, he has to work on it. If it ever gets to the point that I know it is beyond him, then I help him get out from under. I don't do it for him. My motto: "Put it away, give it away or throw it away." We use three bags: one for hand-me-downs for relatives, one for charity and one for garbage. Everything else is put back in its place.

Don't let your kids ruin your house. Take control right now and try to turn those bad habits around. Someone else is going to have to live with your kids one day. — CHICAGO

DEAR CHICAGO: Beautiful! Your kids are lucky, and so are those who are going to live with them one day.

DEAR ABBY: I am so disgusted with my husband, I don't know what to do! This is a second marriage for both of us and we've been married only a year. He's 49 and I'm 42.

My problem is, I found out recently that the guys he works with on third shift are watching porno movies! Then I found some porno tapes he had hidden in a closet. When I confronted him about them, he became furious! Abby, he seems to get more turned on by these movies than he does by me. We hardly ever make love anymore. I threw the tapes away, and now I don't know if I can ever trust him again. I do love him, and this hurts me terribly. What do you suggest? — HURT AND DISGUSTED

DEAR HURT: You need more help than I can give you in a letter. If you want your second marriage to succeed, please consult a marriage counselor — both of you. If he refuses to go, go alone. The survival of your marriage depends upon it.

Most teen-agers do not know the facts about drugs, AIDS, and how to prevent unwanted pregnancy. It's all in Abby's updated, expanded booklet, "What Every Teen Should Know." To order, send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$3.95 (\$4.50 in Canada) to: Dear Abby Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054. (Postage is included.)

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**SEARS**

correction notice

On Page 3 of the March 21 pre-print, the Kenmore #73401/73311 gas range is incorrectly described as having an electronic clock, it has a dial clock. On page 4 of the March 21 pre-print the #60051 refrigerator is incorrectly described as having 20.4 cu. ft. capacity. It has only 19.9 cu. ft. capacity. We regret any inconvenience these errors may have caused our customers.